

Testimony of Mikael Brooks
Student at Common Ground High School,
358 Springside Avenue, New Haven, CT 06515
Testimony submitted to the Appropriations Committee
March 24th, 2011

Honorable Chairs, Members of the Appropriation Committee:

A Protest over Unjust Funding

I am a student from Common Ground High School, a Charter school on Springside Avenue in New Haven. As a New Haven school, it is entitled to a certain amount of money varying by the number of students it handles. It receives this money... with a destructive catch: the New Haven Public Schools make a plus of \$14,000 per student, while Common Ground High School makes not much more than \$9,000 per student. This injustice is costly to both the education of the students, as well as the financial security of the staff and school itself. Common Ground barely makes enough to get by on its own, having to struggle to get what money we can to continue open without sacrificing teachers or teaching ability. Without further assistance, Common Ground may cease to exist, a travesty in its own right.

Common Ground High School not only is a good school, where the teachers put their full effort into the education of the students even at sacrifice of their own wealth and health; but where the teachers show an effort that many teachers in public schools throughout New Haven and other schools do not show. The sheer mass of college acceptances at Common Ground proves this point efficiently: A grand total of 95%. As one of the highest acceptance rates in the state, it is well worth the investment in education for the next generation who could possibly solve many problems in the economy, as well as in the environment as is Common Ground's focus.

One example of the effect of the teacher's added effort, as well as Common Ground's advantages over most other schools in the field of education, is the case of one Christian Algarin-Cruz Jr. Originally, he was a student at Wilby High School in Waterbury. Struggling in school, he was failing many of his classes, often doing fairly in the beginning, and then plummeting toward the end of the year, and many times failing at least one class each semester. Upon attending Common Ground, as a Freshman at the age of 17, he began to receive the help and care the teachers show their students. Christian has yet to fail a class this year, and does not show signs that he will, and, while the classes are harder than before, the assistance of his teachers has drastically supported him in his studies, and helped him to excel in his classes in areas he struggled with before. With this kind of dedication to students, the amount of assistance Common Ground could give its students with a more fair basis of funding would increase exponentially.

Another point of injustice is the funding impacts on special needs and special education students. This is a matter rather dire, and rather closely tied to me, being an autistic-spectrum student myself. More funding could greatly assist in supporting special needs students such as myself and a couple of my friends, and the special education students within the school. Many of these services are very costly, and just a little bit more funding would go a long way.

Common Ground students go out into the community and complete a total of 15 hours of service each year to graduate to the next grade. There are many students who donate more time than that, into the hundreds of hours supporting the New Haven community, aiding the community and helping people who truly need it to help New Haven become a better place. The support from Common Ground students is continuous and ongoing in New Haven.. Should Common Ground not receive this funding, and should it be forced to close, this assistance to the city in cleaning and keeping the city a positive place to live and work will vanish. Is it really too much to ask that some assistance be returned in the form of the funding given to other schools in New Haven, unjustly refused to Common Ground?

Many of us at Common Ground are concerned over these matters, as can be expected. This school is our livelihood, and, in many cases, our homes away from homes. Many of us thrive on the school society, and require it as a way of life. To see such a glorious, useful school fade and fall apart would be a disgrace, and truly a blemish on New Haven. The funding that Common Ground would receive would help to secure the future for the next generation, and many generations to follow.

Sincerely,

Mikael Brooks, Common Ground Junior